



LOCAL & STATE

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### **Local legislator urges people to support Broadband Choice Act**

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Supporters of the Broadband Choice Act say it could usher in a new era of Internet-related investment.

This new piece of legislation, authored by U.S. Sens. John Ensign, R-Nev., and John McCain, R-Ariz., proposes what it calls the first comprehensive update to U.S. communications laws in nearly a decade.

State Sen. Terry Burton, R-Newton, who serves on the American Legislative Exchange Council's Information Technology and Telecommunications Task Force, supports the legislation.

"Broad reform will spur significant investment, job creation and growth throughout our economy. The bill goes a long way toward creating a level playing field for the industry," Burton said.

"We will see renewed investment and innovation, (and) expanding consumer choices as market principles trigger the spread of new technologies in rural areas. With so much to gain in Mississippi and beyond, it is critical for the Senate to support this bill."

Burton represents the 31st District in the Mississippi Senate, comprised of parts of Lauderdale, Newton and Scott counties.

The creators of the Broadband Choice Act said previous laws barely acknowledge the existence of the Internet. The new legislation is designed to free companies to invest and compete head-to-head, allow consumer choice to determine market winners and unlock the full potential of competition, investment and innovation.

- special to The Star

Thousands of new jobs in the financial and service industries have come to Maine because of this state's advanced telecommunications infrastructure, with a recently announced decision to bring 700 call center jobs to Oakland just one example of the growth supported by state-of-the-art networks.

When businesses are backed by the best technology, they are capable of first-rate competition with companies far beyond Maine's borders - and with this growth, new jobs for Mainers will follow.

I'm glad to see that Congress is taking up this issue through a series of hearings exploring new advances in telecommunications, from the exciting potential of VOI technology enabling consumers to place calls through their Internet or cable provider to the promise of broadband television offerings from phone companies.

These innovations can open up a whole new landscape of choices and services, and this progress, as well as other new inventions, will reach consumers much faster if all telecom providers are free to invest and compete in direct response to consumer demands.

What is the next big communications innovation? It's anyone's guess.

What I know for sure is that we must update U.S. communications policy to support a modern, competitive information economy. Our lawmakers also must take affirmative steps to ensure that all companies uphold vital social objectives, such as E-911 and law enforcement needs.

Chief among these priorities, a modern telecom policy must stabilize Universal Service, which ensures affordable basic phone service in rural areas and for low-income families, as well as providing schools and libraries with Internet connections.

With so much choice, innovation, economic opportunities and key social objectives hanging in the balance, our lawmakers cannot afford to put off this important reform effort.

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